
Determining Eligibility for Free and Reduced Price Meals in the Child Nutrition Programs

Summer, 2001

Introduction

- ◆ Problem: Ineligible children are certified eligible to receive free & reduced price meals as a result of inaccurate information provided by households.

Background

- ◆ This presentation is intended to highlight Federal policy regarding the determination and verification of students' eligibility for free and reduced price meals.
- ◆ For more detailed information on making eligibility determinations, see the Eligibility Guidance for School Meals Manual (August, 1991).

F & RP Reimbursement

- ◆ To be eligible for benefits, a child must be directly certified or the family must have submitted an application, and have been determined eligible.
- ◆ The SFA must have a valid application on file for each income and categorically eligible student, and a list of those students directly certified.
- ◆ Applications from the prior year are valid for no more than the first 30 operating days of the school year.

Complete Application

- ◆ A complete application must include the following required information:
 - Information to determine income eligibility; OR
 - Information to determine categorical eligibility for Food Stamp/FDPIR/TANF

Required Information to Determine Income Eligibility

- names of all household members including the child for whom application is made;
- social security number of the adult who signs the application;
- current amount of income for each household member who has an income and the source of income; and
- signature of an adult household member.

Required Information to Determine Categorical Eligibility

- name of child
- the appropriate Food Stamp, TANF or FDPIR case number or other FDPIR identifier, and
- the signature of an adult household member.

Required Information to Directly Certify

- name of child
- identifiers
- signature of certifying
official
- date

Application Approval or Denial

- ◆ Applications should be processed within 10 working days.
- ◆ If there are any inconsistencies or questions concerning the information provided, the household's application must be denied unless the inconsistencies are resolved.

Temporary Approval

- ◆ Applications which warrant temporary approval:
 - temporary layoffs/disability
 - strikes
 - temporary receipt of public assistance
 - zero income, for whatever reason

Households That Fail to Apply

- ◆ Local officials may complete an application for a student known to be eligible if the household fails to apply.
- ◆ This application must be based on household size and income information, and the source of this documentation must be noted on the application.
- ◆ This option is intended for limited use, and may not be used for categories or groups.

Income Eligibility

- ◆ SFA compares household size and income to the Income Eligibility Guidelines (IEGs)
- ◆ Special income situations:
 - Seasonal Workers and Others: households may use a projection of earnings.
 - Self-Employed: may use last year's income to project their current year's income.
 - Wages and Self-Employment: each amount must be listed separately.

Verification of Eligibility

- ◆ Must include either confirmation of:
 - ◆ Current income eligibility, or
 - ◆ Food Stamps/FDPIR or TANF eligibility.

Verification Requirements

- ◆ SFAs must use either random or focused sampling.
- ◆ Approve first, then verify.
- ◆ Complete verification by December 15.
- ◆ A multi-child application is one application.

Random Sampling

- ◆ The SFA must verify a minimum of 3 percent or 3,000 of the total number of approved applications. A random selection procedure must be used.

Focused Sampling

- ◆ The SFA must verify a minimum of:
 - 📁 1 percent or 1,000 of the total number of approved applications (income and categorical); PLUS
 - 📁 .5 percent (one half of one percent) or 500 of the total applications that were approved based on categorical eligibility

Example of Focused Sampling

300 income applications

200 categorical applications

150 direct certifications *

= 500 total applications in the application pool (* direct certifications not included)

1) 500 total applications $\times .01 = 5$

2) 200 categorical applications $\times .005 = 1$

Total sample $= 6$

Implementation of Verification

- ◆ Verify all questionable applications.
- ◆ SFAs are encouraged to expand their sample sizes.

Verification Methods

- ◆ Written evidence
- ◆ Collateral contacts
- ◆ Agency records

Results of Verification

- ◆ Verification results in:
 - No change in benefit level,
 - Reduction in benefit level,
 - Increase in benefit level, or
 - Termination of benefits.
- ◆ Extend results to all children in the household.

Households that Reapply for Program Benefits

- ◆ Households affected by a reduction or termination of benefits may reapply at any time during the school year.
- ◆ The household should be required to submit income documentation or proof of participation in Food Stamps/ FDPIR or TANF before approval.

Recordkeeping

- ◆ Maintain a description of verification efforts, and
- ◆ Maintain verification documentation.

Verification Results

The SFA should review the results:

- Are more households failing to respond?
- Are more households having benefits reduced or terminated?